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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 002414

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BARUCH SPIEGEL DISCUSSES QASSAMS, KARNI, OUTPOSTS  
AND OBSTACLES

REF: TEL AVIV 2301

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) In a June 19 meeting with the Ambassador, reserve Brigadier General (BG) Baruch Spiegel reported that the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee had agreed that the Qassam rocket launches from Gaza must be stopped "at all costs." Spiegel was interested, but hesitant, about the effect an international monitoring group might have on Qassam fire. Spiegel repeated a request for U.S. assistance in procuring tunnel detection technology for use at the Karni Terminal. Spiegel promised to check on the Ambassador's concerns regarding the alleged corruption of Israeli officials at Karni, the accumulation of demurrage charges on empty shipping containers, and the unwillingness to employ U.S.-leased container-scanning devices at the terminal. Spiegel confirmed that Defense Minister Peretz had appointed his political advisor to review the route of the separation barrier around Jerusalem and Ariel. He also discussed GOI intentions to act against illegal outposts and admitted that the number of Israeli checkpoints and roadblocks in the West Bank had increased to 381 from about 350 over the past month.

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QASSAM ROCKETS  
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2. (C) BG Spiegel (res) opened the meeting by saying that he had just returned from a three-hour meeting of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee dominated by discussion of continued firing of Qassam rockets from Gaza into Israel's western Negev desert. Spiegel said that the Qassam situation is grave and that the Committee had agreed that the rocket firing must be stopped "at all costs."

3. (C) The Ambassador sought Spiegel's views on the establishment of an international mechanism -- such as the Israel-Lebanon Monitoring Group (ILMG) of 1996 -- to help neutralize the Qassam launches. The Ambassador suggested that either the Egyptians or Jordanians might be able to play a positive role in such a body. Spiegel agreed that the Qassam problem is analogous to the Katyusha threat from Lebanon. He said that Israel would not accept such a mechanism if its purpose was to be an "international referee," but might see value in having such a body to provide crisis management and serve as a confidence-building measure. Spiegel said that he could informally raise the Ambassador's idea with GOI officials, but he believed that at this point it was premature for the GOI to offer any conciliatory measures on the Qassam issue. The Ambassador agreed that there would have to be agreed principles before such a mechanism could succeed. He suggested that proposing the creation of such a mechanism at the proper time might strengthen the hand of Palestinians willing to take cooperative steps towards solving the Qassam problem. Spiegel also revealed that Defense Minister Amir Peretz was scheduled to meet with PLO chief negotiator Sa'eb Erekat later that evening.

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GAZA CROSSING ISSUES  
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4. (C) Regarding the Karni Terminal, Spiegel said that the second deployment of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's Presidential Guard to secure the Palestinian side of Karni had begun. Spiegel reported that 262 truckloads had passed into Gaza and 40 had left Gaza through Karni today. He asked for Embassy help to follow up on the Israeli request for tunnel detection technology. He said that the Israeli defense attach was working this issue from Washington, and that three IDF officials have prepared to visit the U.S. in July to discuss such technology.

5. (C) The Ambassador raised the issue of corruption on the Israeli side of Karni, describing allegations from American companies that Israeli officials have demanded bribes to schedule their goods to cross into Gaza. The Ambassador also raised the issue of empty containers, used to ship humanitarian goods to Gaza, that are being delayed at Karni.

The containers are accumulating demurrage charges for UNRWA and WFP, among other NGOs. The Econ Counselor reminded Spiegel that the USG leased high-power container-scanning devices specifically to screen containers while maintaining terminal security, but that the GOI had not yet employed them to full capacity at Karni. Spiegel said that he would check on the scanners and the containers. The Ambassador agreed with Spiegel's suggestion that he meet with Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz and the Chief of the Israeli Airports Authority, Gadi Ophir, to discuss these issues in the coming weeks.

16. (C) Spiegel was generally pessimistic about Rafah, saying that the situation is "very bad" and that "no one could stop the flow of money through Rafah." The Ambassador suggested that the GOI would benefit from the adoption of the long-ago drafted customs protocol governing the Rafah crossing, which would help limit the amount of cash brought across the Egyptian border. Spiegel recommended that the Ambassador raise the Rafah customs protocol issue with Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and Finance Ministry Director General Yossi Bachar.

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PERETZ REVIEWING ROUTE OF SEPARATION BARRIER?  
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17. (C) The Ambassador asked Spiegel about the recent media report that Peretz had ordered a comprehensive review of the route of the separation barrier. Spiegel said that it would be "impossible" for Peretz to conduct a complete review, but that he had heard that Peretz had appointed his political advisor, Hagai Alon, to meet with several NGOs, such as Peace Now, to discuss their concerns for the barrier's route around Ariel, Maale Adumim, the E-1 neighborhood, and other locations near Jerusalem. Spiegel said that the decision on the barrier's final route would be one of the many decisions to be taken as part of the "realignment" plan.

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DISMANTLING OUTPOSTS AND CHECKPOINTS  
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18. (C) Spiegel reported that Justice Minister Haim Ramon and Peretz are in agreement that illegal outposts and settlements in the West Bank constitute "criminal activity" that must be stopped. He said that the inclusion of settlers from such illegal outposts in the government's discussions has yielded productive results in earning settlers' trust. Spiegel hinted that future actions to dismantle outposts could occur quite soon, once the government's lawyers reach an agreement on where to relocate the settlers. The government is exploring options to relocate settlers on "legal settlements" and in communities within green-line Israel.

19. (C) The Ambassador queried Spiegel about the latest GOI plans to remove obstacles to Palestinian movement in the West Bank. Spiegel admitted that the number of checkpoints and roadblocks has actually increased in the past month to 381 from about 350. Spiegel told the Ambassador that despite this increase, he is confident that Peretz has a "clear philosophy" about removing obstacles to movement and encouraged the Ambassador to discuss this with Peretz. Spiegel said that the GOI understands that removing obstacles to movement would be a complementary part of the "realignment" plan.

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JONES